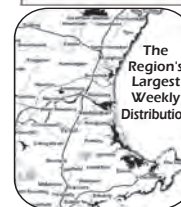


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Wednesday, February 26, 2025 - Vol. 21, No. 18

FREE



Téada (Photo by Damien Stenson courtesy of the band)

Ready for Irish Music?

By Stewart Lytle, Reporter

NEWBURYPORT – After the snows of the last few weeks, the Belleville Roots Concert for St. Patrick's Day is a welcome harbinger of spring.

The non-profit organization that supports the maintenance and restoration of the historic Belleville Church buildings is bringing back the world-renowned Irish band, Téada, for two St. Paddy's Day performances.

Téada will perform at 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. at the Belleville Congregational Church on Sunday, March 9.

Caitríona Sherlock, a traditional Irish and Classical Crossover singer, will join the lads for the two concerts. She was a three-year, all-Ireland champion in the Fleadh Ceoil for Sean Nós singing.

With a worldwide reach, Téada has headlined major music festivals throughout

the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Europe, Africa, Russia, Israel and Australia. Highlights include filling a 30,000-capacity stadium concert in Brittany, performances at Rainforest World Music Festival and Penang World Music Festival in Malaysia, Edmonton Folk Festival in Canada, Harare International Festival of the Arts in Zimbabwe and World Music Festival Taiwan.

In spring 2022, Téada dropped its sixth album under the Gael Linn label, showcasing the amazing vocals of Séamus Begley and the band's knack for breathing new life into some lesser-known traditional tunes.

The Belleville Roots Music Series has two main goals: to bring to the North Shore a diverse range of top-notch Roots Music and to gather funds for the restoration and upkeep of the historic 1867 Belleville Meetinghouse and the nearby Fiske Chapel complex at 300 High Street in Newburyport.

Tickets are \$10 for children 18 and under and \$40 for adults. For more information, email bellevilleroots@gmail.com or visit www.bellevilleroots.org.

Belleville Roots accepts tax-deductible donations at Belleville Roots Music Series, 300 High Street, Newburyport, MA 01950.



(From left) Allison Lebane, Al Jason and Jane Merrow at the First Parish Newbury Food Pantry (Photo by Stewart Lytle)

School Left-overs Feed Needy Adults

By Stewart Lytle, Reporter

REGIONAL – If your student does not eat an apple for lunch at school or passes on the chocolate milk and prepared sandwiches, don't worry, the uneaten food will not go to waste. Thanks to an amazingly successful program run by the First Parish Newbury Food Pantry, the food feeds needy families or at worst, local pigs.

Every Friday afternoon after lunch, three of the pantry's volunteers visit Triton, Newburyport, Pentucket and most recently Ipswich school cafeterias to pick up salads,

fruits, yogurts, milks, juices and pre-made sandwiches that are uneaten and bring it to the pantry.

There, the recovered food is weighed, logged in and made ready for distribution to drive-through clients starting at 2 p.m. or is driven in the all-volunteer effort to local half-way houses.

In 2024, the pantry's program recovered almost 17,000 pounds of food that would have been discarded. That was more than double the 7,700 pounds recovered from the schools in 2023.

"We are always looking for ways in which

we can recover perfectly good food that would end up in landfills," pantry director Jane Merrow wrote in her most recent newsletter.

Food is recovered from Triton High School, Newbury Elementary, Salisbury Elementary, Newburyport High School, Nock Middle School/Molin Upper Elementary, Pentucket High School and Ipswich High School. It is always looking for other schools that have free lunches.

The Nock Middle School and Molin Upper Elementary schools set a record last

Continued on page 4



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How to Submit Letters to the Editor



Marc Maravalli, B.S., R.Ph. Publisher/Editor, The Town Common

Letters to the Editor provide a useful way of communicating concerns, issues, or suggestions to all members of the community.

The Town Common encourages all citizens to submit letters concerning issues of interest and concern to the local community.

Letters selected for publication may be edited for length and clarity. Some letters may serve as a catalyst for other articles or coverage, and community leaders and agencies will be offered an opportunity to respond to letters concerning their areas of responsibility.

All letters must be signed and include a daytime telephone number.

Letters may be submitted to:

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c/o The Town Common
77 Wethersfield St.
Rowley, MA 01969

or preferably via e-mail to:
editor@thetowncommon.com.

The Town Common deadline is 5pm Wednesday (except when a federal holiday necessitates an earlier deadline).

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In loving memory of

Liz Ichizawa, '04-05 Reporter (1956 - 2005)
Jim Wilson, '20-22 Publisher/Editor (1954-2022)

Taxpayer Money Makes 'Free Fare' on MEVA Permanent

By Stewart Lytle, Reporter

REGIONAL – The colorful buses that ply the streets and shopping centers of the Merrimack Valley will keep running fare free permanently, the first transit authority in the state to do so.

Originally funded almost three years ago through federal COVID-19 relief funds and sustained using state funding from the Fair Share Amendment, the Merrimack Valley Transit Authority (MeVa) board voted 15-0 with one abstention this month to make the free rides permanent.

“MeVa’s fare-free program has fostered a multitude of operational, environmental, and social benefits,” the board was told as part of a presentation of the business case

for keeping the free fare policy. “This is incredible news for the Merrimack Valley and the people who use our service to access all that life has to offer.”

The business case was completed by the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission and the firm Stantec.

“Since transportation is the key to everything, the positive impact of fare-free buses has broad reaching impact across all sectors,” the business case concluded.

It cost MeVa 27 cents of every dollar to collect fares on its fixed route buses in 2019 in direct costs. That does not include ancillary costs such as longer time for passengers to board the bus.

In addition, the business case concluded that more people patronized businesses in

the Merrimack Valley, which adds sales tax revenue and increases access to jobs. The time that it takes a passenger to board the bus has been cut in half, reducing idling and allowing buses to run more efficiently, the business case states.

As a result, residents are driving less, which reduces emissions, the report stated.

In a survey of passengers, riders reported high satisfaction with the bus service. It has also increased access to medical care and decreased social isolation.

Because of the fare-free program, ridership on MeVa has become more demographically diverse. Half of the riders are Hispanic, and a third of the riders were born outside the U.S. More women (about 63 percent) ride the bus, and riders ages are evenly distributed

across working age categories.

One in five MeVa riders earn less than \$10,000 a year, while almost 40 percent make less than \$25,000. Almost two third makes less than \$75,000 a year.

Only 12 percent of riders said they had access to a private vehicle. About half of all riders take MeVa buses nearly every day, and almost 90 percent ride at least once per week.

“Hundreds of thousands of Massachusetts residents rely on their Regional Transit Authorities to get to and from work, the grocery store, doctor’s appointments and school. We’re proud to be delivering this funding to help RTAs keep their service fare free to save money for riders and encourage more people to use public transportation,” Gov. Maura Healey said.

Lt. Gov. Kim Driscoll called the results of the free fare pilot program incredible. “More riders are saving money by choosing to take public transportation. We’re excited to be able to support the continuation of these programs with full state funding, which will significantly benefit our residents, communities, businesses and economy.”

MEVA launched its two-year pilot program in March of 2022 and extended it with additional funding for another year.

With revenues in a state of flux, MEVA has created a development department to identify and apply for grants from local foundations, including the Barr Foundation, and businesses that benefit from MEVA’s ridership.

MEVA is considering other revenue sources, including advertising on benches along the route and creating a digital QR code system for customers to pay for the ride if they can, Executive Director Noah Berger said in a recent interview.

“Everything is on the table,” Berger said.

Whittier Tech Shuts Down Four Programs

By Ava Moeckel, Reporter

HAVERTHILL – While considering steps to merge with Northern Essex Community College (NECC), Whittier Regional Vocational Technical High School’s committee voted last week to end or consolidate several underperforming classes for next year, including Design and Visual Communications.

Supt. Maureen Lynch proposed closing Early Education and Care, Engineering, Construction Craft Laborer, and Design and Visual Communications. Each was attracting less than a handful of ninth -grade students.

Several teachers and graduates spoke at the beginning of the meeting, urging the

committee to keep the Design and Visual Communications and the Early Childhood Education programs. Only four students signed up for each for next year.

Only two students signed up for construction craft, which will probably be integrated with other construction programs. A total of four students signed up for Design and Visual Communications, which is graduating 14 out of 26 students this year.

Masonry was also on the list, but chair Scott Wood requested it not be included. Many ninth graders expressed little interest in majoring in those programs, and Lynch said funds for these declining programs were needed for plumbing and heating and air conditioning equipment in the 50-year-old

building.

She said the school must be “good stewards for the taxpayers” and must take care of the students and staff.

To merge the Whittier and NECC campuses into one on the current NECC campus, the two institutions continue to meet to discuss sites for a new Whittier building, which may be built in part by the Massachusetts School Building Authority.

Whittier attempted to secure funding for a new building from the 11 towns and cities in its district last year, but voters rejected the \$444.6 million project last January.

A closing plan for the underperforming courses will be reviewed by the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Any students currently enrolled will be allowed to finish the programs, Lynch said. ♦

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27	Thu	10:42	9.0	11:11	8.3	4:29	0.2	5:04	-0.5	6:19	5:31	☾
28	Fri	11:29	9.2	11:56	8.8	5:17	-0.3	5:47	-0.8	6:18	5:33	☾
1	Sat			12:16	9.3	6:05	-0.7	6:31	-0.9	6:16	5:34	☾
2	Sun	12:40	9.2	1:04	9.2	6:54	-1.0	7:15	-0.8	6:15	5:35	☾
3	Mon	1:27	9.5	1:54	8.9	7:44	-1.1	8:03	-0.6	6:13	5:36	☾
4	Tue	2:16	9.5	2:47	8.5	8:38	-1.0	8:53	-0.3	6:11	5:38	☾
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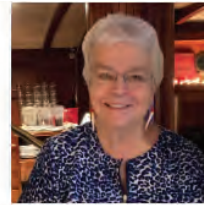
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Groveland Council on Aging Presents "Empowered Voices" International Women's Day Panel on March 8

GROVELAND – The Groveland Council on Aging proudly presents Empowered Voices, a special International Women's Day panel celebrating women who are making an impact in our communities. This inspiring discussion will take place on Saturday, March 8, at 2:00 PM at Veasey Park, 201 Washington St, Groveland, MA 01834. Featuring accomplished women from

diverse fields, the panel will explore personal and professional journeys, the challenges they've navigated, and the actions they are taking to shape their communities. Empowered Voices offers a unique opportunity to engage with leaders across generations, fostering meaningful conversations on empowerment and progress.

Facilitated by Elaine Tahmizian Meuse – Citizen of the World
Event Highlights:

- Insightful discussions from dynamic women leaders
- Open Q&A session for meaningful audience engagement
- Practical takeaways to inspire and empower personal and professional growth

This free event is open to all, with an RSVP strongly encouraged. Learn more about our panelist and reserve your seat here: <https://www.eventcreate.com/e/empoweredvoices2025>

Empowered Voices aligns with the global movement of International Women's Day, recognizing the strength, wisdom, and resilience of women shaping communities and accelerating action for a better future. This year's theme, Accelerate Action, encourages collective efforts toward gender equality and social change.

Join us for an afternoon of reflection, inspiration, and community as we honor the impact of women's leadership and advocacy.

Questions or Comments, please contact the Groveland Council on Aging at 978-372-1101 or COA@grovelandma.com



Conceptual example

MBTA ACT Ruling: 'Unfunded Mandate' A Statement from the Town of Wrentham on MBTA Communities Act Determination

WRENTHAM — The following is a statement from the Wrentham Select Board and Interim Town Manager Michael King:

The Wrentham Select Board has received a response to its unfunded mandate determination request from the Office of the State Auditor, Diana DiZoglio, through the Division of Local Mandates (DLM).

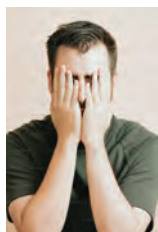
In October, the Select Board asked DLM to provide a determination of whether the MBTA Communities Act constitutes an unfunded mandate imposed on cities and towns by the Commonwealth within the meaning of the Local Mandate Law, and the extent of its fiscal impact.

DLM issued a determination on Friday, Feb. 21, that the MBTA Communities Act **does constitute an unfunded mandate** because the Supreme Judicial Court ruled the Act is a mandate and because the existing funding mechanisms do not fulfill the requirements of the Local Mandate Law.

Municipalities can either continue to comply with no guarantee of reimbursement for expenses incurred or, under the Local Mandate Law, petition the Superior Court for an exemption from compliance until funding is provided. The Town still awaits the issuance of its requested fiscal impact analysis from DLM, which will determine the financial costs relative to compliance with the Act.

The Town of Wrentham is currently reviewing the determination with legal counsel and evaluating next steps. ♦

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73320468	SOLD	35 Spafford Street	Georgetown, MA	AN4281	Detached	2	\$775,000	\$820,000
73314147	SOLD	379 Central St	Rowley, MA	AN6617	Detached	3	\$945,000	\$932,500
73312068	SOLD	11 Esy Way	Groveland, MA	AN7144	Detached	3	\$1,050,000	\$1,010,000
73314315	SOLD	6 Wainwright St	Ipswich, MA	AN4824	Detached	3	\$945,000	\$1,158,000
73313001	SOLD	15 Oakwood Knoll Rd	Ipswich, MA	AN8279	Detached	3	\$1,195,000	\$1,185,000
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73312412	SOLD	55 Farley Ave	Ipswich, MA	AN7537	Detached	5	\$1,189,000	\$1,310,000
73314015	SOLD	5 Herrick Road	Bosford, MA	AN6219	Detached	3	\$1,399,000	\$1,400,000
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From TikTok to Town Hall: How Gen Z Connects with Local News

by Renna Hwang

Did you know that 63% of Gen Z get their news from social media, while older generations still rely on newspapers and TV? These days, you're more likely to hear about breaking news from a TikTok slideshow than from a traditional newspaper. But as news consumption shifts, what does that mean for local journalism?

Local newspapers, like *The Town Common*, have always played a crucial role in keeping communities informed. But in a world of viral trends and 15-second updates, how do younger generations stay connected to their local news? And should we be worried that we're scrolling past the stories that impact us?

How Gen Z Consumes News

Unlike older generations who grew up with TV news and print newspapers, Gen Z gets its news in fast, digestible formats:

- **TikTok** – Quick breakdowns of current events, often by influencers or random users.
- **Instagram & Twitter (X)** – Headlines, memes, and viral discussions make it easy to stay updated (or misinformed).
- **Snapchat's News Feed & YouTube** – Short explainers that feel more like entertainment than traditional journalism.

It's **fast, accessible, and engaging** but has downsides—misinformation, lack of depth, and an algorithm that mostly shows what you already agree with.

Ms. Lynda Fitzgerald, an English teacher at *The Governor's Academy* who has been teaching for over 40 years, has some thoughts on this. "My granddaughter gets all her

information from TikTok, and honestly... that worries me," she said.

She's not alone. Many adults are skeptical of social media as a reliable news source. "I listen to local Boston news, and I still read newspapers and magazines," she said. "I don't trust those platforms... and, well, you all seem to be very dependent on that 10-second-long video."

While that might be up for debate, one thing is clear: Gen Z and older generations get their news in very different ways.

Why Local News Still Matters

Social media makes it easy to stay updated on **global** news, but it often misses the **local** stories that shape our daily lives. That's where newspapers like *The Town Common* come in.

Ms. Fitzgerald believes local journalism should be preserved because it connects people to their communities in ways national news doesn't. "This is the base of where politics start," she explained. "If we didn't have these local newspapers, there would be no representation in the long run."

She also pointed out something many of us can relate to. "I do get local news on my phone, but it's all breaking news—like a car crash or a shooter," she said. "I mean, it's tragic and heartbreaking, but I also want to know **other** things happening in my community. And that's what makes local journalism important."

It's a good point. Without local newspapers, how would we hear about new businesses, town meetings, or that random

festival happening downtown this weekend? **Can Local News and Social Media Work Together?**

While traditional newspapers are still crucial, they don't have to compete with social media. They can adapt. Some local papers have started using Instagram, Facebook, and even TikTok to connect with younger audiences. Imagine *The Town Common* sharing quick news updates through Instagram reels or breaking downtown meetings on TikTok.

Could local papers embrace digital trends without losing their identity? Maybe. And **maybe it's up to us, Gen Z, to meet them halfway.**

Conclusion: Why We Should Care

As much as we love our fast-scrolling news, there's still value in slowing down and engaging with **local journalism**. Whether it's reading an article online or picking up a paper at a local café, staying informed about our town matters.

So, the next time something big happens in our community, ask yourself: **Would you know about it if you only relied on that breaking news headline on your phone?** If not, maybe it's time to check in with *The Town Common*. ♦

About the Author: I am Renna Hwang, a 10th-grade student at The Governor's Academy in Byfield. I've been passionate about journalism and writing since a young age. Now, as a volunteer journalist for The Town Common, I'm excited to explore local stories and share a fresh perspective on community news.

Leftovers Feed the Needy

Continued from page 1

week on the Friday before winter break when the pantry collected 873 pounds.

Lehane and Jason are joined by a third volunteer, Bay James, and could use more helpers.

The volunteers believe the program also teaches the students to be less wasteful. When they finish their lunch, the students drop their uneaten food into cardboard boxes rather than in the trash. They know

where the boxes of food are going, said Allison Lehane, who heads the program.

The pantry also picks up surplus food from local restaurants and bakeries, making a nice dinner for happy clients on the weekend, Merrow said.

"It's like Meals on Wheels on steroids," said Al Jason, one of the volunteers. Merrow agreed with his description, but added "With heart."

The food recovery program, the first ever in Massachusetts, was started by Lehane, who was described by her fellow volunteers

as the "heroine" of the program. Seven years ago, she was volunteering with both the Newbury pantry and the Nourishing the North Shore program, which started the school recovery effort.

When the Nourishing volunteers, who collect 70,000 pounds of donated food a year and distribute it to 3,000 low-income individuals, decided that collecting from the schools did not fit its mission, Lehane asked Merrow if the Newbury pantry would adopt the program.

At the end of the day Friday, the pantry delivers any remaining school food to Salisbury's Link House and Maris House that house recovering addiction clients and to the Pettengill House, which serves low-income families.

Lehane and Jason agreed that the credit for the program is with the school staff. "They are lovely people," Jason said. "They make it so easy." ♦

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Masconomet Varsity Girls Soccer team outside the Massachusetts State House on Feb. 10. (Photo Courtesy Masconomet Regional High School)

Masconomet Regional High School Varsity Girls Soccer Team Visits the State House Following MIAA Division II State Championship Win

Superintendent Michael Harvey and Principal Katie DiNardo are pleased to share that the Masconomet Regional High School Varsity Girls Soccer team recently visited the Massachusetts State House.

The girls' soccer team won the MIAA Division II State Championship in November 2024 and recently visited the State House on Monday, Feb. 10 to commemorate their accomplishment.

During the visit, the team was given a tour of the State House and was presented with individual citations by the local senator and state representatives. Also during the visit, the

team was invited onto the Senate floor for photo opportunities, went onto the balcony, and waved at passersby on the Boston Common.

This is the first time Masconomet Girls Soccer has won a state championship since 1989. The team held a 22-0-1 record throughout the season, ranking first in their division, and won the state championship 5-0 over Duxbury. Throughout the season, the team had 19 shutout games and outscored opponents 101-6. The seniors on the team will leave Masconomet with a career record of 74 wins, five losses, and five ties, with three undefeated regular seasons.

"It has been an incredible honor to watch these girls achieve their goals and be recognized for all their hard work throughout the season," said Masconomet High School Varsity Girls Soccer Coach Alison Lecesse. "We had an amazing time at the State House. It allowed our team to meet Sen. Tarr and state representatives and celebrate their accomplishments on a larger scale."

The Masconomet Girls Soccer program has been coached by Lecesse, Assistant Varsity Coach Dan Bisceglia, Junior Varsity 1 Coach Krista Marcoulier, and Junior Varsity 2 Coach Scott Marcoulier. ♦

Upcoming Events

GEORGETOWN

**Ecological Gardening Basics
Monday, March 3, 6 P.M.**

**Georgetown Peabody Library
2 Maple St., Georgetown, Mass.**

Do you want to start incorporating native plants in your garden to support our local ecosystems? Get rid of potentially invasive plants on your property? Not sure where to start? This lecture will bring you through the ins and outs of installing a pollinator-friendly garden or meadow and some best practices for the most eco-friendly garden possible. North Shore native plant gardener Cheryl Rafuse will tell you all about the bees and butterflies, flowers and shrubs, and the easiest ways to start incorporating keystone species into your gardens.

Cheryl Rafuse owns and operates Plant Magic Gardens in Danvers, MA. They are an ecologically conscious gardening company that focuses on planting native plants. She and her team of top-notch gardeners design and install gardens, perform garden maintenance. Cheryl tries to provide educational opportunities to the community and her clients about how we can all support local pollinators and wildlife with our gardens.

This program is sponsored by the Friends of the Georgetown Peabody Library.

ROWLEY

**The Rowley Democratic Town Committee Wednesday, February 26
7 pm at the Rowley Public Library**

The Rowley DTC provides a forum to meet like-minded people, learn about local issues and candidates, and be active

participants in the political process. For any questions about our meetings or to be added to our monthly newsletter please check out our website at www.rowleydemocrats.org. [Editor's Note: If the Rowley Republicans decide to create a local committee, we will post their meeting notices also.]

REGIONAL

Jewish Women's History Month

In celebration of Jewish Women's History Month, Lappin Foundation, JCCNS, and NSJCC invite the community to Ballots, Babies, and Banners of Peace, featuring Dr. Melissa R. Klapper, Professor of History and Director of Women's & Gender Studies at Rowan University. The program will highlight the untold story of American Jewish Women's Pre-World War II activism and the long history of American Jewish women's involvement in making change in the world around them. The program will take place on Wednesday, March 5, 2025, 7:30 p.m. ET on Zoom. The program is free, and everyone is welcome. Please register at LappinFoundation.org. For more information contact Sharon Wyner at 978-565-4450 or email swyner@lappinfoundation.org.

MERRIMAC

**Mystery Author Event
Saturday, March 22**

Love mysteries? Join the Friends of the Merrimac Public Library for an exciting mystery author event, "We're Not Making This Up", sponsored by Sisters in Crime, on Saturday, March 22 at 1:00 p.m. at the Merrimac Public Library. Crime fiction

authors BJ Magnani, Edith Maxwell and Matt Cost will discuss how they use real-life murders and other events to write compelling stories. Space is limited, so register now by signing up at the library or visiting facebook.com/friendmpl for more information.

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